

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

April 1 – 30, 2006

This is a summary of Mexican wolf reintroduction project activities in Arizona on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) and in New Mexico on the Gila National Forest (GNF). Additional information can be obtained by calling (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653, or by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department Web site at <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf> or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Web site at <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>. Past updates may also be viewed on either Web site or interested parties may sign up to receive this update electronically by visiting <http://www.azgfd.gov/signup>. This update is a public document and information in it can be used for any purpose. The reintroduction project is a multi-agency, cooperative effort among the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA Forest Service (USFS), USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT). Other entities cooperate through the Adaptive Management Work Group that meets quarterly in Arizona and/or New Mexico, including the San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT), the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) and Defenders of Wildlife.

To view the wolf distribution map, which contains the most recent three months of wolf aerial locations, please visit <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf>. Under “Mexican Wolf Conservation and Management,” scroll down to the links under “Distribution.”

Please report any wolf sightings or suspected livestock depredations to: (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653. To report incidents of take or harassment of wolves, please call the AGFD’s 24-hour dispatch (Operation Game Thief) at 1-800-352-0700.

Numbering System: Mexican wolves are given an identification number recorded in an official studbook that tracks the history of all known Mexican wolves. Capital letters (M = Male, F = Female) preceding the number indicate adult animals 18 months or older. Lower case letters (m = male, f = female) indicate wolves younger than 18 months or pups. The capital letter “A” preceding the letter and number indicate alpha wolves.

Definitions: For the purposes of the Monthly Update, a “wolf pack” is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established home range. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) recognizes that wolves without radio telemetry collars sometimes form packs. If the IFT confirms that wolves are associating with each other and are reasonably resident within the same home range, they will be referenced as a pack.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of the end of April, the collared population consisted of 20* wolves with functional collars dispersed among ten packs, including two lone wolves.

* See “New Translocation” below and Aspen Pack AM512 for more information.

Wolf observation reports from the public are important and should be reported immediately. All wolf-sighting reports are recorded and evaluated. Please call 1-888-459-9653 to report a wolf observation as soon as possible after the sighting. Thank you for your help.

SEASONAL NEWS

Mexican wolf pups are generally born mid-April to mid-May. In the upcoming months, the IFT will be actively monitoring to determine if females are denning in order to document wild-born pups.

NEW TRANSLOCATION

On April 25, the IFT translocated the Nantac Pack, comprised of AF873 and AM993, to the eastern side of the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA) in New Mexico. The alpha pair had been exhibiting breeding behavior prior to translocation; however, test results came back negative for pregnancy. The IFT placed the wolves in a temporary

mesh pen, which they chewed through three days later. The site was selected because of its long distance from the San Carlos Apache Reservation, where the IFT removed the wolves in 2005 at the Tribe's request. AF873 is formerly of the Aspen Pack and M993 is a wild-born wolf; genetic testing has been unable to determine M993's pack origin.

IN ARIZONA:

Bluestem Pack (collared AF521, AM507, M990 and m991)

The IFT located the alpha pair, AF521 and AM507, with sub-adult M990 and yearling m991 throughout April within the pack's traditional home range in the eastern portion of the Fort Apache Indian Reservation (FAIR) and west-central portion of the ASNF. On the April 4 telemetry flight, the IFT located m991 alone on the SCAR, approximately 10 miles east of the rest of the pack on the FAIR. On April 12, the IFT located the pack on the SCAR, approximately ½ mile west of the SCAR/FAIR border. On April 24, the IFT located the pack on the SCAR/FAIR border.

Hawks Nest Pack (collared AF486 and AM619)

This pack continued to use its traditional home range northeast of the Big Lake area on the ASNF. Visual observations confirm only the presence of the alpha pair.

Hon-Dah Pack (collared AM578) located on the FAIR

On April 19, the USFWS issued a permanent Removal Order for the entire Hon-Dah Pack at the request of the WMAT Tribal Council. The removal is a result of the pack being directly involved in six confirmed cattle depredations, four probable depredations and one confirmed cattle injury on tribal lands since June 7, 2005, with the majority of depredations occurring this April. On April 20, IFT personnel successfully captured an uncollared male, later assigned studbook number M1018. The IFT transported it to the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility in New Mexico. Six days later, Ladder Ranch personnel found M1018 dead in its pen. The wolf was sent to a laboratory for a necropsy to determine the cause of death. On April 28, IFT personnel captured another uncollared male on the FAIR, assigned it studbook number M1019, and transported it to the Ladder Ranch Facility.

Prior to the removal of M1018 and M1019, the Hon-Dah Pack comprised five known animals: AM578, and alpha female (unknown origin, likely wild-born) and three other wolves.

Rim Pack (collared AF858 and AM992)

The IFT located these two wolves together throughout April within their traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF; however, on April 12, the IFT located the pack on the SCAR. On April 17, the IFT located AM992 alone on the SCAR in an area one mile west of the SCAR/FAIR border, and the IFT located AF858 eight miles away on the ASFS. By the end of April, the pair had rejoined.

San Mateo Pack (collared AF903 and AM796, with a non-functional collar, but believed to be with AF903)

During April, the San Mateo Pack continued to utilize areas east of Escudilla Mountain near the Arizona/New Mexico border with three of four aerial telemetry locations occurring in Arizona.

IN NEW MEXICO:

Aspen Pack (collared AF667 and uncollared AM512)

Throughout April, the IFT located the Aspen Pack in the eastern portion of the Gila Wilderness. On April 4, IFT personnel remotely released and recovered the GPS collar of AM512 as it had exhausted its expected battery life. On April 6, project personnel observed an uncollared wolf believed to be AM512.

Luna Pack (collared AM583 and m925 and uncollared AF562)

The alpha pair, AF562 and AM583, as well as yearling m925, remained within their traditional home range area in the central portion of the GNF. On April 11, project personnel observed AM583 and m925.

Saddle Pack (collared AF797 and uncollared AM732)

During April, the Saddle Pack continued to use traditional Saddle Pack home range areas in the southern portion of the GNF. On April 27, the IFT documented m1007 for the first time with the Saddle Pack. M1007 had been captured and collared on January 18, 2006, in association with dispersing Saddle sub-adults M864 and M863.

Middle Fork Pack (collared sub-adults F861 and M871)

Throughout April, the IFT located these two wolves together along the northwestern periphery of the Aspen Pack's core-use area in the central portion of the Gila Wilderness.

SINGLE WOLVES

Collared sub-adult M864, New Mexico

Throughout most of April, the IFT located M864 outside of the BRWRA boundary with locations on the Plains of San Agustin on April 4 and 14. On the April 20 and 24 aerial telemetry flights, the IFT located M864 in the San Mateo Mountains. By April 30, M864 had returned to the BRWRA.

Collared m1007, New Mexico

During April, the IFT located yearling m1007 east of the Saddle Pack territory in the eastern portion of the BRWRA. On April 27, the IFT documented m1007 with the Saddle alpha pair for the first time (see above).

INCIDENTS

On April 8, IFT personnel found a dead domestic bull in Apache County. An IFT-WS investigation revealed that the cause of death to be the result of a vehicle collision. USFS and IFT personnel removed the carcass to prevent wolves from scavenging on it near the road.

On April 13, an IFT-WS investigation confirmed that a wolf killed a cow outside the BRWRA boundary in Catron County. The IFT attributed the depredation to M864, as it was the only known wolf in the vicinity. This is the second confirmed depredation incident for M864; the first being a depredation on August 16, 2005, when it was associated with the Saddle Pack. On April 14, the IFT placed traps near the carcass in an effort to capture M864; however, M864 soon left the area and trapping was suspended.

On April 22, IFT-WS personnel investigated reports of three dead cows in New Mexico. They determined that one cow died from an infection and one died calving. They determined that wolves killed the third, a calf. The IFT attributed the depredation to the Saddle Pack, as the pack had been confirmed in the area. This is the second depredation incident for the pack; the first of which occurred in August 2005.

On April 23, IFT personnel received a call from a permittee that an injured calf had been located. An IFT-WS investigation the following day revealed that the injury, confirmed to have been caused by wolves, was several weeks old. The injury could have been caused by m1007 as it had been documented as being in the area previously. Because the injury did not result in a fatality, it is not considered a depredation. The IFT will closely monitor m1007's movements.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

On April 15, two pairs of wolves, M806 and F838 and M730 and F638, produced litters of pups at the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility.

On April 26, project personnel found M1018 dead in its pen at the Ladder Ranch Facility. The IFT sent the wolf to a laboratory for a necropsy to determine the cause of death. (See "Hon-Dah Pack" above for more information.)

On April 30, project personnel sent F613 to the Cincinnati Zoo. The IFT permanently removed the wolf from the wild on November 14, 2005.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On April 6, Dan Groebner and Shawna Nelson spoke to approximately 300 Blue Ridge Elementary students on the natural history of wolves and other Arizona wildlife at the Show Low Historical Museum.

On April 18 and 19, the IFT held meetings in Morenci, AZ, and Alpine, AZ, to provide information and collect public comment on wolf pack releases proposed for 2006 in Arizona.

On April 22, the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) held a meeting in Pinetop, AZ. Agenda items included upcoming translocations in New Mexico, initial releases proposed for 2006 in Arizona, and the 5-Year Review outcomes and implementation actions. Information on the AMWG meetings is disseminated electronically through a self-subscription newsletter titled Endangered Species Updates. Sign up to receive the newsletter at <http://azgfd.gov/signup>.

On April 29, Saleen Richter, Field Team Leader for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, gave a presentation to 15 Project Wild teacher workshop participants near Glenwood, NM.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

On April 30, USFWS volunteer Jeff Dolphin left the project to take a position working with burrowing owls in Colorado.

REWARDS OFFERED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a reward of up to \$10,000 and the Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief is offering a reward of up to \$1,000 for information leading to the conviction of the individual(s) responsible for the shooting deaths of Mexican gray wolves. A variety of public interest groups are offering an additional \$35,000, for a total reward amount of up to \$46,000, depending on the information provided.

Individuals with information they believe may be helpful are urged to call one of the following agencies: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents in Mesa, AZ, at (480) 967-7900, in Alpine, AZ, at (928) 339-4232, or in Albuquerque, NM, at (505) 346-7828; the White Mountain Apache Tribe at (928) 338-1023 or (928) 338-4385; Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief at 1-800-352-0700; or New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Operation Game Thief at 1-800-432-4263.

Killing a Mexican wolf is a violation of the federal Endangered Species Act, and can result in criminal penalties of up to \$50,000 and/or not more than one year in jail, and/or a civil penalty of up to \$25,000.